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1 It should come as no surprise that Hollywood has historically looked to canonical and contemporary novels for its source material. After all, both film and print fiction have tended to succeed or fail depending on their ability to provide audiences with a compelling narrative structure, complete with a cohesive and coherent plot. Indeed, the predisposition toward narrativity is so strong and so pervasive that, as Christian Metz puts it, even supposedly non-narrative films ... are governed essentially by the same semiological mechanisms that govern the "feature films"(144). Metz refers to documentary and educational films here, and it is true that these genres rely on the strong narrativity of feature films as much as any big-budget summer blockbuster. But the narrative coherence inherent in the "semiological mechanisms" Metz alludes to is especially problematic when it comes to adapting source material that actively resists this pull, particularly when dealing with a genre—autobiography—whose adaptations necessarily entail a shift in both authorship and purpose. The question, then, is whether autobiography adaptations can balance the demands made by the form and content of their source materials with the strong narrativity Metz highlights.

2 Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini's 2003 film *American Splendor* offers one possible answer to this question, illustrating some of the complexities inherent in this balancing act, but their adaptation also demonstrates the aesthetic and thematic potential inherent in this complexity. The source material for the film—Harvey Pekar's long-running autobiographical comic strip *American Splendor*—features a fragmented structure driven by portraiture and lyricism rather than strong narrative propulsion, but Berman and Pulcini's film adapts its source material to a different purpose. At the same time, however, Berman and Pulcini highlight their own status as adapters,

making their intervention "visible" to audiences not only as a remediation, but as a repurposing.[1] *American Splendor* adapts Pekar's comics into a hybrid of documentary and dramatic narrative, balancing the filmmakers' repurposing of Pekar's life story with a highly foregrounded sense of its own mediation. In other words, Berman and Pulcini turn the opposition between cinematic narrative propulsion and Pekar's open-ended episodes to their aesthetic advantage, using this friction between strong and weak narrativity as an invitation for audiences to consider just what kind of story a life is, anyway.

3 Published since 1976, Pekar's *American Splendor* relates stories drawn from the author's life, with a focus on the ordinary and the mundane: Pekar's boring job as a filing clerk in a hospital, his intermittent longing for romance, his car troubles and his financial worries. While sometimes presented as episodic narratives, these stories frequently take the form of lyric meditations ; the action of the narrative will be relatively unimportant, while Pekar's musings serve as the focus of the reader's attention. For example, the narrative action of "I'll Be Forty-three on Friday (How I'm Living Now)" is that Harvey takes a walk through a park, but over the course of the short eight-page comic, Harvey's thoughts range from the lessons of his past to existential musings on the meaninglessness of life, ending with his grave reflection, "God, I'm trying t'do the best I can but I dunno, I dunno . . ." Interspersed throughout these quotidian narratives are Pekar's thoughts on comic book aesthetics and jazz history, as well as philosophical discourses about the meaning of names and identity ; the minimalist "The Harvey Pekar Name Story," for example, has Pekar simply facing the reader and telling a story about other people named Harvey Pekar whose lives seem to be "linked in some indefinable way" to his own.

4 Although this lyric content of Pekar's comics does not recommend itself as particularly cinematic, *American Splendor*'s comics form offers particularly rich source material for a cinematic adaptation ; each story is always already both a collaborative project and an adaptation, given that Pekar does not illustrate his own comics. (In a scene from the film, Berman and Pulcini portray him as barely capable of drawing a stick figure.) Instead, he sketches a rough storyboard for his dialogue and narration and gives this template to a collaborator to illustrate ; in this way, each artist is adapting Pekar's text in much the same way a director turns a screenplay into a finished product.. Indeed, the list of illustrators who have collaborated on issues of *American Splendor* is an exhaustive catalogue of underground comics artists. In addition to frequently collaborating with illustrators like Kevin Brown, Gary Dumm, Sue Cavey, and Gerry Shamray—all associated primarily with *Splendor*—Pekar has also worked with legendary comics artists like Gilbert Hernandez, Eddie Campbell, and most notoriously, R. Crumb. This variety in Pekar's illustrators naturally produces a variety of visual styles, both for the individual issues in general and for the actual visual image of the character Harvey in particular. Pekar even foregrounds his own shifting appearance in his story "A Marriage Album," in which Joyce Brabner, Pekar's third wife, prepares to meet him for the first time ; she wonders which of the illustrations the real Harvey will look like, her thought bubble filled with the varied portraits she has seen in comics. As such, Pekar's *American Splendor* is not only an interesting and thoughtful autobiography, but one with a history of successful mediation by its illustrators built into its form, making it an apt candidate for remediation into another visual medium.[2]

5 As a result, Berman and Pulcini's adaptation of *American Splendor* is just one in a long string of visual remediations of Pekar's stories. But Berman and Pulcini's film does not just remediate its source material into a new visual form ; it also repurposes its content, constructing from Pekar's sprawling, episodic series of vignettes a cohesive film narrative that follows the character arc of the biopic genre. In other words, the weak narrativity of philosophical comics essays like "I'll Be Forty-three on Friday (How I'm Living Now)" is replaced by Berman and Pulcini with a teleological problem-solution narrative in which Harvey identifies and overcomes the fatal flaw from which all his problems emerge, eventually discovering his medium, finding love, building a family, and overcoming cancer. However, Berman and Pulcini's film also overtly displays its own status as a reinterpretation and a repurposing of Pekar's work by undermining this teleological momentum even as it constructs it. By rendering their own role as mediators and interpreters visible, Berman and Pulcini invite their audience to not only engage with their text, but also to view their text as explicitly a repurposing of Pekar's comics.

6 While this adaptation strategy pervades the film, Berman and Pulcini make their repurposing most visible in the film's opening and closing minutes. Indeed, these narrative moments are critical for their adaptation strategy for the same reason that beginnings and endings are always important : the beginning of a narrative constitutes an invitation for audience members to interpret what is to follow in a particular way, and an ending provides the lens through which audience members will retrospectively understand the narrative as a whole. By examining the chronological progression with which Berman and Pulcini introduce and conclude their adaptation of Pekar's life, we can reveal both how their film infuses Pekar's source material with a strong sense of narrative momentum and how the filmmakers undermine this strong narrativity by making visible their own interpretive intervention.

7 In the three discrete segments which open the movie, Berman and Pulcini first announce their intention to fit Pekar's *American Splendor* into a teleological biopic storyline, then foreground their cinematic remediation of Pekar's comic form, and finally undermine their own repurposing by presenting a forceful counter to their own narrativity, allowing Pekar himself to interrupt its building momentum. The first segment begins with one of the film's only narrative sequences not found in Pekar's comic books. The film opens with a musical sting featuring brass instruments playing minor chords and a prominent theremin, an electronic instrument frequently used in science fiction and horror films to create an eerie and mysterious effect. The film's visual track then opens on a close-up of a child's hand ringing a doorbell, upon which is superimposed a comic-style caption which reads "1950: Our story begins . . ." A wider shot follows, revealing five children standing on a porch decorated for Halloween ; four children are clearly dressed as superheroes, while the fifth wears normal street clothes. A woman appears on the porch and awards candy to the costumed children, explicitly naming the characters—Superman, Batman and Robin, and the Green Lantern, all franchise characters of DC Comics. And then she reaches the last child :

> WOMAN: And what about you, young man?
> YOUNG HARVEY : What about what ?
> WOMAN : Who are you supposed to be ?
> YOUNG HARVEY : I'm Harvey Pekar.
> OTHER KIDS : (whispering mockingly) Pecker.
> WOMAN : Harvey Pekar ? That doesn't sound like a superhero to me.

> YOUNG HARVEY : I ain't no superhero, lady. I'm just a kid from the neighborhood, alright ? Aw, forget this.

8 The young Pekar stalks off the porch and into the street, throwing his sack of candy into the gutter and muttering "Why does everybody have to be so stupid?" The camera then match cuts from Pekar as a child, marching angrily through the streets, to Pekar as an adult (Paul Giamatti) trudging down a similar street with a look of disgust on his face, while a loud jazz number introduces the opening credits.

9 While only a brief scene, this introduction sets up a variety of expectations for the audience. This audience may be familiar with Pekar and his work in underground comics or may have walked into the theater with no prior information at all, but either way the film uses this first scene to set up its central problem : that Harvey is a misanthropic neurotic who has trouble fitting in, a working-class nobody in a world that only cares about superheroes. Berman and Pulcini use this contradiction between banal normality and the high drama of superhero comics as the problem that sustains the dramatic action of the entire film, the narrative drive that motivates Harvey's insistence that he can write comics about the ordinary, his neurotic romance with Brabner, his public feud with David Letterman, his battle with cancer, and finally his formation of a quasi-nuclear family when he and Brabner adopt Danielle, the biological daughter of one of Pekar's artists. While invented for the film, Berman and Pulcini use this fabricated childhood prologue to suggest that all of Harvey's problems can be summarized in this single incident. Thus the film's prologue primes the audience to wonder how young Harvey will find happiness and fulfillment in a world where the only stories worth telling are about the extraordinary. With this prompting, then, the film encourages the audience to interpret everything that follows—the story of Harvey's life, adapted from Pekar's comics—as a response to this original problem, generating a teleological narrative unity to Harvey's life that is missing from the episodic narration of Pekar's source material.

10 That said, however, the opening credits which follow this prologue immediately begin to undermine this nascent biopic teleology, both by focusing the film's attention on the materiality and form of Pekar's autobiography itself and by depicting several different versions of Harvey on the screen.[3] Berman and Pulcini foreground the aesthetic surfaces of Pekar's comics in a variety of ways. First, the match cut from young Harvey to the older version played by Giamatti leads to a series of quick cuts that provide a cinematic analogue to the gutters of the comics form (or the individual frames in a roll of film). The shot sequence is brief, less than seven seconds, and consists of fragments of a longer single take of Giamatti trudging down the street. Berman and Pulcini cut two sections from the take, however, and by cutting abruptly over the missing moments to a new image that almost matches the previous one, they produce a cinematic analogue for the temporal caesura inherent to the gaps between the panels of most comics, including much of Pekar's *Splendor*. Just as the spaces between comics panels "fracture both time and space, offering a jagged staccato rhythm of unconnected moments" (McCloud 60), Berman and Pulcini's abrupt cuts create a syncopated visual rhythm that emulates the jazz soundtrack, but that requires audiences to fill in the temporal gaps missing from the visual narrative. Further, the audience's effort "to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality" across these cuts also mirrors the task the filmmakers have before them, connecting Pekar's comic episodes and cinematically constructing a continuous, unified narrative (ibid.). This technique makes only a brief appearance here, but its

presence announces a kind of hybrid form between Berman and Pulcini's filmic narrativity and Pekar's comics fracturing, one that continues throughout the opening credits.

11 Immediately after mimicking the fractured narrativity of the comics form, the camera pulls back to reveal that the credits are also actually structured as a comic book. The camera moves from left to right as if reading a comics page, panning across panels which contain either a location shot from the streets of Cleveland—which comes to life as the camera focuses on it—or a still illustration of Harvey talking to the audience about the film they are about to watch using comics speech bubbles. Over the course of the credits, various illustrators' iterations of Harvey's image cohere into the following monologue:

> CRUMB HARVEY: My name is Harvey Pekar. I'm a character in a celebrated underground comic book.
> BUDGETT AND DUMM HARVEY : Different artists draw me all kindsa ways.
> PHOTOREALIST HARVEY : But hey, I'm also a real guy . . .
> CRUMB HARVEY : An' now this guy here's playin' me in a movie . . .
> SHAMRAY HARVEY: Anyway, if you're wonderin' how a nobody guy like me ended up with so many incarnations, pay attention . . .

12 As this monologue ends, the camera zooms in on the last panel, leaving the credits behind to return to the narrative present of the film, following Giamatti's Harvey as he trudges through the Cleveland streets. This time, however, the filmmakers have added a voiceover narrator who addresses the audience and talks about Harvey as the camera follows him.

13 This voiceover narrator is a crucial part of Berman and Pulcini's attempt to render their own adaptation visible to viewers, and the voiceover's appearance at the end of the credits initiates a struggle for interpretive agency that will continue throughout the movie. However, this voiceover serves this function because it is contextualized by the work the opening credits have done. If the prologue depicting Harvey's childhood invites viewers to anticipate a teleological narrativity in which subsequent events are read through and in response to young Harvey's cynicism and frustrations, these credits immediately begin to complicate Berman and Pulcini's repurposing, both by presenting images from Pekar's own work to the audience and by displaying, on a literal level, a catalogue of different kinds of Harveys. Berman and Pulcini put Pekar's work right in front of the viewers' eyes, not only in their allusions to the general form of the comics medium, but also in the specific illustrations of Harvey they take from Pekar's work.

14 Naturally, there are a few different interpretive possibilities here. On the one hand, the monologue imbedded in these Harvey images can be read as Pekar's more authentic voice intruding upon and seizing control of the narrative just as it is beginning ; this reading invites audiences to understand Pekar's presence as a kind of authorial authority that resists Berman and Pulcini's reshaping. At the same time, however, viewers can also read this presence not as the authentic Pekar, but as a voice created by Berman and Pulcini in order to co-opt Pekar, using him as a ventriloquist's dummy to offer a seal of approval that legitimizes their particular repurposing of his life. Either reading is possible, but in either case, Harvey's introduction explicitly reminds the reader that "[d]ifferent artists draw me all kindsa different ways," foregrounding the fact that the film *American Splendor* is just another instantiation of this pattern, one that

is just as mediated and constructed by Berman and Pulcini as the different illustrators' images.

15 This explicit point is made metaphorically, as well, in the many different visual incarnations that the audience sees in the credits. Just over three and a half minutes into the film, the audience has already seen eight different visual representations of Harvey. This includes the still illustrations mentioned above, the young Harvey of the prologue (Daniel Tay), and Giamatti, who portrays the role for most of the rest of the film. (Donal Logue appears in a later scene as an actor playing Harvey in a dramatic adaptation of *American Splendor*—an adaptation attended by Giamatti's Harvey, of course.) But this adds up to only seven Harveys ; the eighth is the actual Pekar himself. In several of the comics panels that are interspersed throughout the opening credits, the tighter shots of Harvey's prowl through Cleveland's urban decay pull back to long shots that capture the entire skyline, dwarfing his figure. In these long shots, observant viewers may note that Giamatti's stocky build is actually replaced by another, leaner figure : a figure who turns out to be the flesh-and-blood Pekar himself.[4]

16 These multiplying Harveys produce much the same effect as Berman and Pulcini's use of Pekar's comics in the credits : in pointing out that their story is a remediation of Pekar's material, the filmmakers prompt viewers to wonder to what extent the directors are contextualizing their own narrative as only one of several possible interpretations, and to what extent this same move is actually a further repurposing, one that presents its self-awareness as a way of legitimizing their narrative. In doing so, Berman and Pulcini make visible—if, to this point, indeterminate—their own position as mediators between the audience and their source material. Audiences cannot know at this point how *Splendor*'s filmmakers have repurposed their source material, but the juxtaposition between the opening scene of Harvey's fictionalized childhood and a credits sequence that foregrounds both the comics medium and the artistic mediation inherent in Pekar's work invites the audience to at least engage with the issue and be aware of this gap.

17 This problem is further clarified as the credits sequence ends, emphasizing both the central plot instability that is key to its narrative teleology—Harvey's cynical misanthropy as an impediment to happiness, love, and fulfillment—and its governing rhetorical tension—the friction between Pekar's original authorship, Berman and Pulcini's adaptation, and the audience's attempt to sort out the difference—by introducing a surprising new formal device.[5] The final shot of the credits zooms in on one of the comic book panels, returning to Giamatti plodding along, but this time with a raspy voiceover narrator :

> Okay, this guy here, he's our man. All grown up and going nowhere. Always a pretty scholarly cat, he never got much of a formal education. For the most part, he's lived in shit neighborhoods, held shit jobs, and is now knee-deep into a disastrous second marriage. So if you're the kind of person looking for romance or escapism, or some fantasy figure to save the day, guess what ? You got the wrong movie.

18 At first, the film invites viewers to read the narrator's characterization as an endorsement of the view of Harvey that Berman and Pulcini set up in the film's prologue: he depicts Harvey as a loser antihero and his story as the antithesis of the kind of "escapism" represented by the "fantasy figure" of Superman or Batman. But while the content of the last line seems to validate this interpretation by endorsing Berman and Pulcini's *Splendor* as a narrative about a misanthropic antihero, the image track undercuts the line by cutting to the narrator—the flesh-and-blood Pekar himself,

sitting in an empty white space surrounded by film equipment and reading his narration into a microphone.[6]

19 Pekar proceeds to have the following unscripted conversation with an offscreen voice, identified in the credits as Berman :

> PEKAR: Okay, so now you got four takes. You ought to be able to patch one together from there. Right ? Let's go to the next one, alright ?
> BERMAN : Hold on a second. Do you want some water or something ?
> PEKAR : Nah, I got lots of orange.
> BERMAN : Do you like orange soda ?
> PEKAR : Yeah, orange is alright.
> BERMAN : Alright, so let's go to the next sequence. . . . Did you actually read the script ?
> PEKAR : No. A little bit. I . . . just to check the construction. You know, how the piece was constructed. I didn't read it word for word.
> BERMAN : Do you feel weird saying this stuff ?
> PEKAR : Nah, I don't feel weird saying it. I don't know how long my voice is going to hold out, but . . .

20 The camera then cuts to Giamatti's Harvey in the first dramatized scene of Harvey's adult life, featuring a crisis involving the simultaneous loss of his voice and his second marriage. But the film returns to this documentary space throughout the film, depicting the flesh-and-blood Pekar alone, but also at times with the real Brabner and his friend and co-worker Toby Radloff, and each time the effect is similar to this first occasion.[7] By shifting abruptly from teleological narrativity into an unscripted documentary, Berman and Pulcini remind the audience of the flesh-and-blood Pekar behind their protagonist Harvey. But in this documentary space, viewers encounter a Pekar who is more or less indifferent to the filmmakers' entire project. Berman attempts to engage her subject in a discussion of the film and elicit his thoughts and feelings about it, but Pekar expresses more enthusiasm for his soda than for the script, and he is more concerned with physically getting through the recording than exploring his feelings about the project. In fact, in contrast to the images of Harvey in the credits, which can be read as an endorsement of Berman and Pulcini's narrative, Pekar's indifference toward the film that purports to tell the story of his life invites the audience to align themselves with his authorial perspective instead of the filmmakers', viewing Berman and Pulcini's narrative as a construction that's tangentially related to Pekar's life—worth glancing at, but not anything to take too seriously or definitively.

21 This feeling fades, of course, as Berman and Pulcini's film gathers narrative momentum and engrosses viewers in the dramatization of Harvey's life and troubles, but each time this narrativity starts to become naturalized as a realistic depiction of this life, the documentary space intrudes to remind viewers—not just through the interruption, but also through Pekar's attitude toward the film—that this narrativity is a remediation and a repurposing of the facts of Pekar's life, not a recreation of it. And this pattern continues throughout the film. Later Pekar and Brabner appear in this documentary space, arguing whether Pekar's negativity about his life is cynical or simply realistic. At another point, the audience hears Pulcini yell "cut" at the end of a dramatic scene and watches as the actors in the scene—Giamatti and Judah Friedlander as Pekar's friend Radloff—walk off the set and into the documentary space ; finished with their scene, the two actors sit quietly on stools and listen to a spontaneous conversation between the people they are playing, the flesh-and-blood Pekar and Radloff. In each individual case and in the overall pattern, the effect is to undermine Berman and Pulcini's

narrative, presenting it as a constructed artifice—one with a useful and entertaining narrative momentum, but always a reinterpretation and repurposing of the events of Pekar's life, not an unmediated presentation of them.

22 In this way, Berman and Pulcini's strategy of making visible their adapting, remediating, and repurposing agency pervades the film and finally culminates in *Splendor*'s ending, which the filmmakers structure in such a way as to mirror the oscillation between their narrative and Pekar's critique found in its beginning. The final dramatic scenes of the film depict, in rapid succession, the critical success of Pekar and Brabner's *Our Cancer Year*, a doctor's assurance that Harvey is cancer-free, Harvey's satisfaction with his nuclear family, and Danielle's burgeoning interest in making her own comics. On one level, these scenes fulfill the narrative teleology that Berman and Pulcini have created, acting as a response to the problem posed by film's prologue : Harvey has managed to find health, happiness, companionship, community, and creative fulfillment despite his bleak view of the world. However, as viewers have come to expect, this narrative teleology and the filmmakers' repurposing of Pekar's comics is undermined as the final shot of Giamatti's Harvey trudging down the street fades into a shot of the flesh-and-blood Pekar walking down the same sidewalk. As the film comes to a close, the author responds to Berman and Pulcini's denouement through his voiceover as the camera cuts to the flesh-and-blood Pekar sitting at his desk at work :

> Yeah, so I guess comics brought me a lot. But don't think this is some sunny, happy ending. Every day is still a major struggle. Joyce and I fight like crazy. And she barely works. The kid's got ADD and is a real handful. My life is total chaos. With a little luck, I'll get a window of good health between retiring and dying. The golden years, right ? Who knows. Between my pension and the chunk of change I get for this film, I should be able to swing something. Sure, I'll lose the war eventually. But the goal is to win a few skirmishes along the way . . . right?

23 As Pekar finishes, the image track shows his retirement party—Pekar surrounded by friends and family who love him—but the audience has no way of knowing whether this footage of the flesh-and-blood Pekar depicts his actual retirement party or a reenactment staged for the film. The camera finally comes to rest on the cover of Pekar's *Our Movie Year* sitting on a stack of medical records, a convenient detail of the *mise en scene* that cuts both ways by suggesting that Berman and Pulcini have staged the entire party, but also by promising that Pekar himself will have the last word after the film has come and gone.[8] In the end, the audience is left oscillating back and forth between the unity and closure suggested by Berman and Pulcini's narrative teleology and Pekar's refusal of it, aware of the contradiction between the two, but unable to resolve it.

24 If this ending does not resolve the rhetorical tension between Pekar and the filmmakers, though, it does carry it to its logical conclusion : that the audience must sort out for themselves which interpretation is more accurate with respect to Pekar's actual life. Is Pekar too negative, as Berman and Pulcini seem to suggest, unable to recognize that the narrative arc of his life has bent toward happiness and success ? In other words, have Berman and Pulcini presented an accurate story of a successful artist who achieved his dreams, in spite of the fact that the artist himself rejects this view ? Or is Pekar right ? Have the filmmakers repurposed a complex, directionless, and ultimately bleak life in order to reach the happy closure that the teleological logic of their biopic film demands?

25 Neither interpretation of *American Splendor* offers an easy answer, but the film does give its audience the tools to see how and to what purpose it reinterprets Pekar's source material. Berman and Pulcini have repurposed Pekar's story to fit the problem-solution teleology typical of the biopic—which must, by necessity, offer audiences some kind of narrative unity and resolution. But at the same time, by emphasizing the comics medium and by disrupting the film's narrative moment with the flesh-and-blood Pekar's objections, distractions, and disinterest, the filmmakers point the audience toward the gap between their strong narrativity and Pekar's own view of his life. In so doing, Berman and Pulcini make themselves visible as mediators and adapters of Pekar's comics, pulling back the curtain and revealing to their viewers the friction between the weak narrativity of the source material and the strong narrativity that "govern[s] the feature films", even their own. The result is a film that brings the audience closer to the life Pekar has led by showing viewers the ways in which both the film and the comics are adaptations of it.

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NOTES

1. I borrow this concept of visibility from translation theorist Lawrence Venuti, who argues that translators should foreground their presence and effort in their translations, making readers aware of their mediation and the distance from the original text (1 – 34).

2. Berman and Pulcini see themselves as "performing the same function as the artists who illustrate [Pekar's] stories" and use this facet of his work as "a license to have the multiple Harvey Pekars in the movie" (Porton 14).

3. Pekar actually seizes control of the film's soundtrack at this point, which features Joe Maneri's "Paniots Nine" during the credits. This is not only reflective of Pekar's interests generally and a striking shift from the theremin music in the opening scene; in 2000, Pekar actually published a glowing review of Maneri's album, admiring "his employment of microtones ... and his blending of jazz, free improvisation, modern classical, Greek, and klezmer sources" and raving that "Maneri's still at least 10 years ahead of his time" (Rev. of *Paniots Nine*). Paradoxically, it is the soundtrack of *American Splendor* that echoes its mute source.

4. Jason Sperb argues that this multiplicity suggests that "there is no single, definitive Harvey to reclaim narratively," leaving audiences with no sense of the real (124). This point might be more persuasive if he were discussing a fiction film, but given that the audience knows that there is a flesh-and-blood Pekar, this multiplicity actually reasserts this single, definitive Harvey behind all of these images, even as it keeps the audience at arm's length from him.

5. I borrow the terms "instability" and "tension" from James Phelan, who makes the distinction between two types of audience engagement: "instabilities, unsettled matters involving elements of story, typically characters and their situations . . . [and] tensions, unsettled matters involving elements of discourse such as unequal knowledge among authors, narrators, and audiences . . . or matters of different values and perceptions" (19 – 20). In this case, the audience's interest in Harvey's life struggles constitutes the film's central instability, while the complex relationship between the flesh-and-blood Pekar, the filmmakers, and the audience itself makes up the film's central tension.

6. Pekar appears in the credits not as playing "himself" but as "Real Harvey," suggesting that like "Young Harvey" and "Stage Actor Harvey," even the flesh-and-blood Pekar is just another interpretation. Similarly, Pulcini's on-screen appearance is credited as "Bob the Director." In *American Splendor*, no one is simply "himself," and no self is simply one person.

7. The filmmakers actually describe this abstract white space as a cinematic analogue for the blank backgrounds in Harvey's comics' panels, extending the work of the credits in continuing to adapt Pekar's medium to film (West et al. 42).

8. In fact, this promise is fulfilled not only in the subsequent publication of *Our Movie Year*, but also in the single story "My Movie Year," published as a small color comic with the DVD.

ABSTRACTS

Beginning with Christian Metz's observation that even supposedly non-narrative films ... are governed essentially by the same semiological mechanisms that govern the "feature films", this article examines one specific case of this trend in Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini's 2003 film adaptation of Harvey Pekar's autobiographical comic *American Splendor*. Faced with the challenge of transposing the episodic nature and weak narrativity of Pekar's comics onto the

screen, Berman and Pulcini infuse their source material with a strong narrative teleology. But the filmmakers also foreground their own remediation of Pekar's comics, making visible their adaptation and inviting viewers to unpack the ways in which their adaptation is also a reinterpretation and a repurposing of the source material.

En partant de l'observation de Christian Metz selon laquelle même les films soi-disant non narratifs sont régis par les mêmes mécanismes sémiologiques que ceux qui régissent les films de fiction, cet article examine une occurrence precise de ce phénomène dans l'adaptation de l'autobiographie en bande dessinée de Harvey Pekar, *American Splendor* par Shari Springer Berman et Robert Pulcini (2003). Confronté au défi de la transposition à l'écran de la nature épisodique et de la faible narrativité de la bande dessinée de Pekar, Berman et Pulcini ont introduit une dimension téléologique. Mais les cinéastes mettent ainsi en avant leur propre re-médiatisation, rendant ainsi visible le travail d'adaptation et invitant les spectateurs à analyser la manière dont leur adaptation constitue aussi une réinterprétation et une réorientation du matériau source.

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Mots-clés: adaptation cinématographique, autobiographie, bande dessinée, narrativité, re-médiatisation, réinterprétation, réorientation
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